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INFORMATION REPORT

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COUNTRY Colombia

SUBJECT Clandestine Communist Organization in Viota

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SUPPLEMENT TO
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1. The Communist Party of Colombia (PCC) in Viota functions within a clandestine organization through which it exercises influence not only in Viota but in the surrounding towns of Anapoima, San Antonio, El Colegio, Tibacuy, and Fusagasuga. The Party is extending its activities to La Mesa, Nilo, Tocaima, Soacha, and Girardot. The Communists are in a position to cut off the road and railway connecting Bogota with Girardot, Ibague, and Neiva. Also, they control the sources of electric power in El Salto and Charquito which supply Bogota with electricity. They are also in a position to exercise control over the movements of travelers into and out of the area.
2. The Party has divided the zonas, or territory, into zones, within each of which there is an independent Communist command, including cell, civil, and military heads, a Popular Council, and a system of defense. The local commands are under a Popular Tribunal for civil matters, and under a General Commandant for military affairs. Victor Merchan is the supreme Communist leader of Viota and the surrounding district.
3. The organization to which the Communists refer as Autodefensa Popular, or emergency defense, follows regulations laid down during a PCC regional meeting held in June 1952 and parallels the regional organization of the PCC. Actually it has been in existence for several years. It comprises 1000 men in arms, equipped with rifles, grenades, machine guns, shelters, and other necessities of a field campaign. Another 1000 men are in reserve, armed with shotguns and machetes. Roads, trails, and sleeping shelters have been built under the natural cover provided by the coffee trees and are invisible from low-flying planes.
4. Under the regional organization plan the individual in charge is called the commander, or the Organizador Regional de Autodefensa, and he must be a member of the PCC. Under him are the Zone Organizers, Zone and Regional Political Instructors, Section or Squad Chiefs, and Group Heads. The commander

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is under instructions to consider the topographical conditions in the area and to decide the number of men required for the most efficient organization. The directing board of each group is composed of the commander, a political instructor, an organizer of provisions or treasurer, an organizer of aids such as ambulances and medical assistance, and an evacuation organizer.

5. Instruction is given on how to handle arms, on the terrain, and on tactical movements, and it is provided to everyone capable of bearing arms. Training is also given in espionage and counterespionage, and methods of liaison among the various groups and zones, in addition to military and political instruction.
6. Each group is required to hold monthly meetings during which some training is given. The latter can be varied from month to month. The tactical and strategic instruction to be given is carefully studied in advance by the organizers of the various groups, together with the regional head. Meetings are staggered between zones, under the direction of the PCC committees or the political organizers, so that instructors may be present at each meeting. Political instructors of each zone assemble once a month to study methods of teaching and directing the program. Meetings are regulated by the PCC regional committee to insure centralized direction and discipline.
7. Regulations are strictly observed. All cases of disorder or delinquency are studied by the Popular Councils, and those guilty are punished. The Tribunal Popular makes the final decision in delicate cases. There are no thieves, and all known spies who have managed to infiltrate the organization have been shot.
8. The district is a state within a state. Viota has long been recognized as a Communist stronghold and is now more than ever under the domination of that Party. The town is located 83 kilometers west of Bogota and is connected by road and railway with the capital. Its inhabitants now number some 14,000, and it is estimated that approximately 85% of the population belong to the Communists' clandestine organization. Participation in the organization is obligatory for all farm workers. Dues are levied, varying from 25 to 50 centavos a month. The majority of the people are armed, including women and children, and even while at work, they carry a rifle, pistol, or machete. The degree of responsibility, solidarity, and discipline of the people is impressive. Their present organization represents many years of education.
9. No attacks are made, and in this sense the people are not guerrillas. However, they are well prepared and ready to defend themselves or to attack immediately upon receipt of orders. The Communists in Viota are opposed to personal attacks and sabotage when these actions are not closely tied in with others on a national scale, and therefore they condemn all isolated acts of terrorism.
10. The anti-guerrilla position taken by the PCC Executive Committee until the spring of this year was largely the result of doubt concerning the military effectiveness of the revolutionary forces. It was believed that the government would soon put down the revolt, and the Party wished to avoid all possible trouble. As the months went by, the guerrillas seemed to be at least holding their own, and the PCC began to revise its views on the matter. In May 1952 a public declaration of moral support of the guerrilla movement was issued by the PCC.¹ At about the same time Gilberto Vieira White, Secretary General of the PCC, began to consider the possibility and convenience of forming a subversive front in the rural area of Viota.
11. The Communists have always been strong in Viota, and Vieira estimated that the Party could count on approximately 2000 supporters there, about half of whom are active members, and the rest are sympathizers. Vieira asked Victor Marchan, of Viota, to continue the organization of clandestine groups throughout the mountainous region surrounding Viota. Efforts were

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also started to connect this movement with other revolutionary activities in the country, inasmuch as PCC leaders had observed that in all of these movements there was one damaging deficiency--a lack of centralized direction.

12. One of Vieira's immediate objectives has been to devise a way to organize a directing body for the anti-government movement in arms. He and Jaime Barrios, Secretary of Organization, have been in regular contact with Merchan and the other Communist leaders in the Viota area. Barrios is quoted as saying recently that organizational efforts have been retarded thus far by the personal hazards involved. However, he said that an attack by the guerrillas on Villavicencio is expected soon, and, if this happens, the distraction provided thereby would be beneficial to the Party's activities in Viota.²

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1. [REDACTED]

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2. [REDACTED] Comment. Action is being taken to obtain confirmation of the information provided in paragraphs 1-9 above.

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